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Twice in one week.

## Outfoxed by Fidel

The nasty truth is that the Carter administration has been had by the Cubans and the Russians in two major political situations this month. Both of these debacles could have been avoided if the US simply had used its head and its tools of intelligence and diplomacy.

I am referring both to the "discovery" of the small Soviet combat force in Cuba, an event abysmally mishandled by the White House on every level, and to the Havana summit conference of the so-called "Non-Aligned Movement," which happened to have been held at the same time. At that meeting the US, to put it charitably, was clobbered as never before by the wily Fidel Castro and his third world allies, with the Russians in the wings loving every moment of it.

The two situations seem unrelated, but a political and psychological nexus exists between them. Unlike the US, the Cubans and the Soviets have evolved a coherent world policy. There are Soviet combat troops in Cuba as part of a comprehensive plan by these two communist governments to continue unfolding a joint policy of capturing, if they can, the leadership of the third world through political action and support for revolutionary movements everywhere.

The reason Moscow maintains (or rotates) combat units in Cuba is to improve the jungle and tropical warfare skills of its own forces and to achieve—through joint maneuvers in a well-protected environment—better coordination with the Cubans. Russian and Cuban troops already have operated jointly in Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen—without US interference. At the Havana meeting, Carter admitted for the first time that Cuban troops fought along with the Syrians in the 1973 war. Evidently the Soviets wish to hone this weapon even sharper for campaigns of tomorrow: in Rhodesia, in the Arabian peninsula, in the Persian Gulf, or wherever. A

contingent from Cuba's revolutionary gendarmes is now in place in Iraq.

This Soviet-Cuban policy operates in the broad context of the rivalry with the West over influence in the third world. It must therefore be politically acceptable to the third world in the guise of ideological support for "liberation" causes, ranging from the Middle East to the Caribbean, and for "economic justice" for the underdeveloped lands. Furthermore, as Castro sought to demonstrate in Havana, the third world must be persuaded that, in his words, the Soviet Union is its "natural ally."

It obviously was an accident that the Havana conference was going on when the Carter administration finally got around to "discovering" what it claims to be some 2500 or 3000 Soviet troops in Cuba. I doubt seriously that the "discovery" was planned to embarrass Castro during his summit; there is too much evidence that the Carter administration had no wish for this knowledge to surface right now because of the trouble it is causing for the now uncertain Senate ratification of the SALT II treaty.

In fact, the disclosure of the Cuban "discovery" has done much more damage to the Carter administration than to Moscow or Havana, particularly because there isn't very much the US can do about it short of triggering a new eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with the Russians that the president clearly does not desire. He already has said that this Russian combat "brigade" poses no military danger to the US.

The Carter administration has only itself to blame for the current political fallout of the "discovery," the threat it poses to SALT II ratification, the further erosion of the intelligence community's credibility, and another drop in the plausibility of Carter's leadership.

In the official version supplied to newsmen after the "discovery," the administration itself admitted that it first learned early in 1978 that there might be Soviet combat troops in Cuba, in addition to the thousands of advisers stationed there for nearly 20 years. But it was telling only part of the truth about what it actually knew a year ago. As far back as last December, key intelligence officers were satisfied that for some time the Soviets had been "rotating" combat units in Cuba for purposes of jungle warfare training. This was known to senior officials in the State Department and the White House. But inexplicably, nothing was done about it—either in terms of diplomatic demarches in Moscow or of stepped-up intelligence gathering efforts. The US government remained asleep at the switch until March 1, when National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski asked Central Intelligence Director Stansfield Turner to find out more about the Soviet troops.

The official version states that it was only in mid-June that an analyst at the National Security Agency came up with "evidence" that a Soviet brigade head-  
ba. This "evidence"